

November 2013

# Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

## Carbohydrates: The Good vs. The Bad

Carbohydrates, often referred to as carbs, have acquired a bad name over the years; however, they are a necessary part of our diets. Carbohydrates are the most important energy source for our cells, tissues, muscles and organs, including our brains. Carbs power our bodies to walk, talk, breathe, think, and digest food. Carbs circulate in our blood and are often referred to as blood sugar or glucose. If we don't get enough carbs in our diet our body can not function properly. As a result, we may experience fatigue or poor mental function. Eating the right carbs in the right amounts can be very healthy.

### Types of Carbohydrates

**Simple carbs** are sugars including those that occur naturally in food, as well as, table sugar or sugars added to food during processing. Simple carbohydrates are named for their simple chemical structure. They are digested easily by the body and processed quickly into energy. We should try to limit adding sugar to our foods or buying foods with added sugar. Sugar adds flavor and calories but no additional nutrients such as, vitamins and minerals.

We should **not** avoid foods with natural sugars such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy. These foods have such a great package of vitamins, minerals, and proteins that the benefits of consuming the food outweigh the consequences of the natural sugar.

Using the ingredients list on food packaging will help you to determine if foods have added sugar. Sugar may appear in the ingredients list under




many names including brown sugar, corn sweetener, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, maple syrup, sucrose, and other types of syrups. If sugar is listed in the ingredients, that means it does not occur naturally in that food.

**Complex carbs** include starches and fiber. These carbohydrates have a more complex chemical structure and therefore take longer for the body to digest and use.

Unlike types of simple carbohydrates, **starches** contain a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. Sources of starches include grains such as rice, oats, wheat, and some vegetables such as potatoes, corn, and green beans.

**Fiber** is a complex carbohydrate that is not digested by the body. Fiber helps provide a feeling of fullness, assists in keeping the colon clean and functioning regularly. In addition, fiber helps to control blood cholesterol and blood sugar. (Continued on back)



The recommended daily amount of fiber is 25 - 30 grams. Most Americans only get about half that amount. Sources of Fiber include beans, lentils, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts. Increase fiber slowly over the course of a few weeks. Increasing fiber too quickly can cause abdominal discomfort.

**Use the following tips to add fiber to your diet:**

- Eat whole grain breads and cereals.
- Have brown or wild rice instead of white rice or potatoes.
- Bake with whole wheat flour. You can use it to replace part or all of the white flour in recipes.
- Add beans and peas to casseroles or soups.
- Choose fresh fruit and vegetables instead of juices.
- Eat fruits and vegetables with peels or skins.
- Use the food label to compare similar foods to find higher fiber choices.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Fluid helps your body process fiber.

**When choosing carbs, focus on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains** without added sugar. These foods are high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber and low in calories.

**Limit foods with added sugar** such as sodas, candies, etc. These foods are low in nutrients and high in calories.

**For more information on carbohydrates:**

- ChooseMyPlate.gov—<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans—<http://www.health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—<http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/carbs.html>

**Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services  
Department for Aging and Independent Living**

275 East Main St 3E-E  
Frankfort Kentucky 40621  
502-564-6930  
<http://chfs.ky.gov/dail>